

*Deer Hunting with Jesus: Dispatches from America's Class War by Joe Bageant*

In *Deer Hunting with Jesus*, author Joe Bageant uses his comedic storytelling skills to shed light on the serious “class war” issue still lingering in America. He starts by introducing himself to the reader. Bageant grew up in Winchester, Virginia with two working parents - his mother in the textile mill and his father at the gas station; he essentially had a “dirt-poor” childhood. After thirty years, he made a middle-class life for himself and returned to Winchester to find, not entirely to his surprise, that it was still home to a permanent underclass.

Bageant discusses the structural differences between the lives of rural conservatives and urban liberals. The “class warfare” between these groups is influenced by opinions of education, politics, and the economy. Furthermore, he discusses how all U.S. citizens ultimately have the same goal - to protect the “American Dream” and all that comes with it (ie. wealth, status, self-actualization, etc.). So if all Americans want the same things, why is there so much strife and disconnect in our nation?

One idea Bageant mentions is the existence of the “American hologram”. The hologram is a symbol of all the things Americans believe about our society (and world) based on corporate sponsored media channels. It is easy to believe there is nothing wrong with our society when we are constantly surrounded by the latest technology or entertainment. Bageant says these media outlets are “spinning mythology like cotton candy” and we do not even realize it! We are so caught up in the media we have no idea it is actually a burden to us. One of the most powerful quotes in the book reads, “You never know you are in a prison unless you try the door.” Americans are imprisoned by propaganda every day of their lives that they do not even realize the culture the lies outside their own little worlds.

Bageant concludes with how ignorance is the fiercest enemy of the working-class in America. Though terrorism, illegal immigration, and drug usage are all major issues, they do not even compare with the ignorance many upper- and middle-class Americans have toward “rednecks” and vice versa. He poses this question in his introduction of the book: “How in the hell can it be that one part of a nation knows so little about the lives of the other?” This statement greatly relates to our class. We have studied how many problems with people going in to developing nations is they do not understand the ways other people live or their cultural values. People go in with a “my way is better for you” mindset, which makes it impossible to foster respect and collaboration between diverse groups of people.

What makes this book unique is the fact that it came from a place of anger and rage - not self-righteousness - but still reads as a smooth, entertaining story. My greatest take away from this book is how important it is to get to know the world around you - watch the news, read the papers, study other places, travel! Whatever you do, go in with an open mind and willingness to learn something new about yourself and the world around you.